Let Us Then Try What Love Can Do

A Personal View Concerning Islam, The West, Prejudice, and Islamophobia

Contents

- Prefatory Note
- Prejudice, Extremism, Islamophobia, and Culture
- Toward A Balanced View Of Islam and The West
- Concerning Islamophobia

Prefatory Note

The three articles included here developed from - and in a many places summarize and/or quote from - replies I sent to various correspondents between February and November of 2012 and which correspondence concerned topics such as prejudice, my views concerning Islam and anti-Muslim groups, the use of the terms culture and civilization, and whether or not those opposed to immigration and/or 'Islamification' are prejudiced and, if so, whether they should be reproved. Given this diversity of topics, and the individual nature of my replies over a period of some nine months, there is inevitably some slight overlap of topics in the three essays.

These articles present only my personal, fallible, opinion about such matters,

and which opinion reflects the weltanschauung and the morality of my philosophy of pathei-mathos (formerly 'the numinous way'), as outlined in *Recuyle of The Philosophy of Pathei-Mathos* and texts such as *Pathei-Mathos - A Path To Humility*.

As I wrote in one such reply in respect of my criticism of certain political groups and their beliefs:

> Reluctant as I am and have been for some time to give my personal opinion about such political organizations - given my own lamentable history of extremism and my many errors of experience spanning some four decades - I cannot quite escape the feeling that perhaps by not criticizing such groups, when directly asked and on the basis of my personal experience and knowledge of extremism, I am somehow not doing something I morally should do.

My criticism of such groups and the anti-Muslim views they expound, and which views form the *raison d'etat* of such groups, derives from my four decades of experience of extremists and my decade of study and personal experience of, and involvement with, Islam; and this experience, involvement, and study has led me to conclude that the majority of people involved with such groups are prejudiced and that the views they expound are unbalanced and extreme revealing as such views do not only a profound ignorance of Islam, of the Muslim way of life, and of Shariah, but also that hubriatic certitude-of-knowing, that impersonal harshness and lack of a personal humility, which are the essence of all extremism and which inspires extremists to violent dishonourable deeds in the name of their prejudice, their cause or their ideology.

Thus, and for example, I draw attention to the fact that such people have the temerity to write, speak, and demonstrate about, what they are ignorant about and prejudiced against, and that one of their propaganda ploys they use, redolent of their ignorance, of their lack of knowledge about Islam and their lack of practical in-depth experience of the Muslim way of life,

> "...is to quote English interpretations of a particular hadith and English interpretations of ayat from the Quran, thus ignoring (i) that a particular hadith or ayat (and Ahadith and Ayah in general) should be studied in Arabic and must be considered in the context of the whole Quran and the Sunnah and Ijmah combined; and (ii) the truth that to know, fully understand, and appreciate, the religion of Islam - the Muslim way of life - one must have extensive practical experience of how those texts, the Quran, the Sunnah, and Ijmah, are manifested by and in the daily and the social lives of those who use them as guides to living and as guides to the sacred, the divine. And a practical

> experience that is diverse: not of only one locale, but of many. In the case of Islam, this means understanding Adab, and appreciating, from experience, the diversity within Islam - for example, the Sufism of North Africa; the way of life of the fellaheen of Egypt, Turkey, Morocco; the way of life of Punjabi Muslims in places like Leicester, and of Muslims in Somali and Dar-es-Salaam. And it is such diverse practical experience that will enable a person to appreciate just what Shariah is, what it means, and what it does not mean nor imply. Anything other than this is, in my view, ignorance of Islam."

In addition, many such anti-Muslim groups and the people involved with or supportive of them - and who say things like "Islam is one of the great evils of the world" - also profess to be defending 'Western Christian culture/civilization' even though their attitude, behaviour, and words, reveal a profound ignorance of Christianity.

It is my belief that such extremism, prejudice and ignorance, should be rejected and exposed; that the ways of Western societies and the Muslim way of life are both - when understood and appreciated - a force for good, and that,

> "...both ways of living, that of West and that of the Muslims, can profitably learn from the other, because reasoned dialogue, an acceptance, celebration, and tolerance, of diversity, is the moral, the virtuous, thing to do. From Islam we in the societies of the West might, for instance, re-learn the virtue of a personal humility, dignity, and respect for the sacred over and above the material and the profane, things which the way of Jesus of Nazareth, and the prophets before him, taught us - or saught to teach us - but which many of us somehow and for some reason seem to have forgotten."

I am thus reminded of words such as the following:

> "For what purpose then was [the scroll of Ruth] written? To teach how great is the reward of those who do deeds of kindness." Midrash Ruth Rabbah 2, 13

> "Let us then try what love can do." William Penn, *Some Fruits of Solitude*

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Prejudice, Extremism, Islamophobia, and Culture

Over the past decade or so there has been a significant increase, in Britain and in Europe in general, in the number of people who claim, believe, or feel, that immigration in general and Islam in particular pose a threat. There is and has been rhetoric, from politicians and agitators, opposing 'multiculturalism' and about 'the threat immigration/Islam pose to French/British/Dutch/German /European/(whatever)' values, civilization, and identity, as there are regular protests about the building of new mosques, and laws in some European nations prohibiting the building of minarets and the wearing in public of hijab and/or the burkha. Organizations opposed to Shariah and what they term 'Islamification' regularly hold demonstrations and protests, many of which are violent or which end in violence, and which organizations directly or indirectly lead to and have led to, or who have members and supporters who commit, Islamophobic [1] incidents such as the harassment of women wearing hijab [2], the desecration of the Quran, the desecration of Muslim graves, and attacks on Mosques and the homes of Muslim families, and many of which incidents are similar to or reminiscent of some anti-Semitic ones.

The question thus arises as to whether such claims, beliefs, or feelings about Islam, Muslims, the Muslim way life, and Islam, are prejudiced and/or extremist, and, if they are prejudiced, whether such prejudice should be reproved.

A Modern Yet Old Concern

An increasing number of people in Western countries seem to feel or are concerned that Islam, and the Muslims who have migrated to or were born in Western countries, are in some way undermining or destroying the indigenous culture/civilization or way of life that such concerned ones - the concernées - identify with. The following comments, although made in respect of Britain, are somewhat typical of this European-wide attitude and concern:

> "Here I was, in the heart of a city in the middle of my own country, a complete outcast and pariah." [3]

> "Far from merging with local communities, many seem to have decided as an act of defiance to live and dress as if still in Bangladesh, Pakistan, Somalia or the Middle East," and that Islam should be 're-branded' for modern Britain. [4]

Islam is "one of the great evils of the world" [5]

"The problems posed by the large-scale immigration of people who do not enter into our European way of life [and] the right of indigenous communities to refuse admission to people who cannot or will not assimilate." [6]

"When we were growing up, Islam wasn't even a word in everyday usage. Now it is an visible part of daily life in most cities. The character of Britain has changed tremendously. Personally, I like that but I think people have a perfect right not to like it and it doesn't make them bad people." [7]

As these and many similar comments indicate, there are common themes to such concerns and attitudes, some of which themes are often unspoken but nevertheless implied. Among these themes are the following: (i) that there is a particular British identity/character, with 'native Britons' regarding Britain as 'their country' and by extension not really the country, the land, of these new 'foreigners'; (ii) that immigrants and those of other cultures and faiths should or must adopt this assumed British identity/character - 'fully integrate', be assimilated - in order to be considered British, with the underlying assumption or prejudice that such a posited British/European identity/character is better than or superior to or more advanced than those other cultures and faiths; (iii) that 'native Britons' are more entitled to the advantages and the opportunities that British society offers than recent (post Second World War) arrivals, especially if these 'new arrivals' belong to a different faith or culture and do not wish to abandon that 'alien' faith or culture or manner of dress, and even if such people of an 'alien' faith or culture are second or third generations citizens, and work and have paid taxes; and (iv) that the indigenous "people have a perfect right not to like [these changes] and it doesn't make them bad people" or extremists.

Among the interesting questions that such concerns and attitudes raise are: why do such people not like such changes, and what is 'bad'. It seems to me that such dislike is often or mostly the result of several factors; for example, a certain instinctive wariness of change and of those who are different; a certain lack of knowledge and lack of understanding of the way of life, the culture, of the newcomers; a certain sense of belonging to their own area or community; and a particular feeling of what it means 'to be British' or English or Scots or Welsh. There is thus, or there develops, an instinctive prejudice, that is a bias - in favour of this posited 'British/Scottish/Welsh way of life' (usually an idealized/romanticised version of it) and not in favour of the newcomers and their ways.

Is this bias bad? I venture to say yes, for two reasons. First (and philosophically) because life itself is and always has been both a flow of change and, beyond the artificial divisions/categories we project upon it, a unity [8]. To try and prevent this natural change by holding onto and dividing human beings into temporal ideated categories based on median assumptions - such as some 'race' or some idealized static national community or static culture said to have arisen during some historical period - is hubris [9]. Second, because I consider the good to be "what is fair; what alleviates or does not cause suffering; what is compassionate; what empathy by its revealing inclines us to do, what inclines us to appreciate the numinous". Thus the bad is what is unfair, what causes suffering, and what is biased, prejudiced, since prejudice [10] in many ways is the opposite of the muliebral virtue of empathy, causing as such prejudice does the impersonal judgemental assessment of a person or persons who are personally unknown, and thence often predisposing an individual or a group to treat those so impersonally judged in a harsh manner. And such prejudice is bad - unfair, morally wrong, deserving of reproval - even if the prejudice that is felt does not lead a particular individual to commit harsh practical violent and/or hateful (and thus by definition extremist) deeds [11].

In my view we should be gently and personally moving away from - and gently and personally encouraging, in others, a moving away from - prejudice (whatever its genesis) toward empathy and the personal, individual, non-judgemental knowing that empathy engenders; away from the artificial (abstract) divisions and categories we have manufactured (and often judge people by) toward an appreciation of the numinous and thus toward a feeling and a knowing of 'that of the numinous in every person' (to again paraphrase George Fox).

Culture, Civilization, and Identity

In the increasing rhetoric about, and the fears concerning, 'the threat Islam poses to European/Western civilization' and 'to French/British/Dutch/German /European/(whatever) values and identity', there are both assumptions and prejudice.

The very usage of the term civilization, for instance, implies a bias; a qualitative often pejorative, prejudiced, assessment and thence a division between something judged 'better than' - or 'superior to' or 'more advanced than' - something else, so that 'to civilize' denotes "the action or process of being made civilized" by something or someone believed or considered to be more distinguished, or better than, or superior to, or more advanced.

Thus - and in common with some other writers [12] - my view is that a clear

distinction should be made between the terms culture, society, and civilization, for the terms culture and society - when, for example, applied to describe and distinguish between the customs and way of life of a group or people, and the codes of behaviour and the administrative organization and governance of those residing in a particular geographical area - are quantitative and descriptive rather than qualitative and judgemental. It is therefore in my view inappropriate to write and talk about a European or a Western 'civilization'.

Given that culture is often understood as the way of life characteristic of a community of people, as their distinctive beliefs, customs, language, and social behaviour, is there a European or a Western culture of which, and for example, a 'British culture' might be a part? Or a unique 'British culture' (and thus identity) which might or might not have some affinity with some European culture? And, if it exists, who or what defines this British culture, and whence did it arise or is assumed to have arisen? For are cultures static, unchangeable entities, or are they, as peoples and languages are and have been, in flux - absorbing, assimilating, developing, and making obsolete. And if cultures are as I incline to believe - and like languages - in flux, is it reasonable to try and make them static, a fixed ideation, by zealously striving to limit them to what they were perceived to be, once, or to what they are understood to be or assumed to be now, and demanding that everyone must adopt this limited and fixed ideation with little or no variation, and certainly no (or only a strictly defined) diversity of change, allowed? [13]

However, insofar as I am concerned, such postulations and theories in respect of cultural identity are the chimæras of our times, and derive from a fundamental misunderstanding of culture. For the essence, the nature, of all cultures is the same: to refine, and develope, the individual; to provide a moral guidance; to cultivate such skills as that of reasoning and learning and civility; to be a repository of the recorded/aural pathei-mathos, experiences, and empathic understanding of others (such as our ancestors) over decades, centuries, millennia, as manifest for example in literature, music, memoirs, poetry, history, Art, and often in the past in myths and legends and religious allegories. A recorded/aural pathei-mathos and empathic understanding - a human learning - which teach the same lessons, whatever the culture, whatever the people, whatever the time and whatever the place. The lesson of the importance of a loyal love between two people; the lesson of the importance of virtues such as $εὐταξία$ [14] and honour; the lesson of the need to avoid committing the error of hubris [15]. The lesson of hope, redemption, and change. And the lesson concerning our own nature:

" From Aeschylus to Sophocles to Siddhārtha Gautama, from the mythos of the Μοῖραι to the postulate of samsara, from the notion of Fate to the Sermon on the Mount, and beyond, we have had available

7

> to us an understanding [of] how we human beings are often balanced
> between honour and dishonour; balanced between ὕβρις and ἀρετή;
> between our animalistic desires, our passions, and our human ability
> to be noble, to achieve excellence; a balance manifest in our known
> ability to be able to control, to restrain, ourselves, and thus find and
> follow a middle way, of ἀρμονίη."   *In Pursuit of Wisdom* (2011)

Ultimately, the assumed or the perceived, the outer, differences do not matter, since what matters for us as human beings capable of reason and civility is our shared humanity and the wisdom that all cultures guide us toward: which wisdom is that it is what is moral - it is what keeps us as mortals balanced, aware of and respective of the numinous - that should guide us, determine our choices and be the basis of our deeds, for our interaction with other human beings, with society, and with the life with which we share this planet.

As outlined in my philosophy of pathei-mathos, my personal view is that the criteria of assessment and judgement are the individual ones of empathy, reason, and the presumption of innocence; which means that abstractions, ideations, theories, and categories, of whatever kind - and whether deemed to be political, religious, or social - are considered an unimportant. That what matters, what is moral, is a very personal knowing in the immediacy-of-the-moment so that what is beyond the purveu of our empathy, of our personal knowing, knowledge, and experience, is something we rationally accept we do not know and so cannot judge or form a reasonable, a fair, a balanced, opinion about. Hence, and for example, individuals and people we do not know, of whatever faith, of whatever perceived ethnicity, sexual orientation, or perceived or assumed or proclaimed culture - whom we have no personal experience of and have had no interaction with over a period of causal time - are unjudged by us and thus given the benefit of the doubt; that is, regarded as innocent, assumed to be good, unless or until direct personal experience, and individual and empathic knowing of them, as individuals, proves otherwise.

> "This acceptance of the empathic - of the human, the personal - scale
> of things and of our limitations as human beings is part of wu-wei. Of
> not-striving, and of not-interfering, beyond the purveu of our empathy
> and our pathei-mathos. Of personally and for ourselves discovering the
> nature, the physis, of beings; of personally working with and not
> against that physis, and of personally accepting that certain matters or
> many matters, because of our lack of personal knowledge and lack of
> personal experience of them, are unknown to us and therefore it is
> unwise, unbalanced, for us to have and express views or opinions
> concerning them, and hubris for us to adhere to and strive to
> implement some ideology which harshly deals with and manifests

harsh views and harsh opinions concerning such personally unknown matters.

Thus what and who are beyond the purveu of empathy and beyond pathei-mathos is or should be of no urgent concern, of no passionate relevance, to the individual seeking balance, harmony, and wisdom, and in truth can be detrimental to finding wisdom and living in accord with the knowledge and understanding so discovered." *Some Personal Musings On Empathy - In relation to the philosophy of πάθει μάθος*

Considered thus, what matters are our own moral character, our interior life, our appreciation of the numinous, and the individual human beings we interact with on the personal level; so that our horizon is to refine ourselves into cultured beings who are civil, reasoned, empathic, non-judgemental, unbiased, and who will, in the words of one guide to what is moral, *Ἀπόδοτε οὖν τὰ Καίσαρος Καίσαρι καὶ τὰ τοῦ Θεοῦ τῷ Θεῷ* [16].

Notes

[1] Islamophobia has been defined, by Professor Erik Bleich, as "indiscriminate negative attitudes or emotions directed at Islam or Muslims," and thus, "as with parallel concepts like homophobia or xenophobia, Islamophobia connotes a broader set of negative attitudes or emotions directed at individuals or groups because of their perceived membership in a category."

See my 2012 article *Concerning Islamophobia* [included below].

[2] In respect of Hijab and some of the myths surrounding it, see, for example, Leila Ahmed: *A Quiet Revolution - The Veil's Resurgence, from the Middle East to America*. Yale University Press, 2012. Leila Ahmed is Professor of Divinity at Harvard.

[3] The quotation is from a book by Clarissa Dickson Wright, published in 2012, the author having been a presenter of several mainstream television cookery programmes.

[4] Trevor Kavanagh, a journalist writing in the British newspaper, The Sun, dated November 20, 2012.

[5] Richard Dawkins, speaking in Stornoway, as reported in The Scotsman

newspaper, dated November 2, 2012.

[6] Roger Scruton, speech at Antwerp, June 23, 2006.

[7] Private communication from an e-mail correspondent, November 2012.

[8] qv. *The Nature of Being and of Beings* section of my *The Way of Pathei-Mathos - A Philosophical Compendiary.*

[9] qv. (i) *The Abstraction of Change as Opposites and Dialectic;* (ii) *Concerning Some Abstractions - Extremism and Race*; (iii) *Recuyle of the Philosophy of Pathei-Mathos.*

It is personal empathy and pathei-mathos which enable us to appreciate the unity beyond the appearance of posited, manufactured, categories and opposites, and which thus inclines us toward knowing and trying to do what is right. As explained in *Recuyle of the Philosophy of Pathei-Mathos*:

> "Empathy - and the knowing that derives from it - thus transcends 'race', politics, religion, gender, sexual orientation, occupation, wealth (or lack of it), 'status', and all the other things and concepts often used to describe, to denote, to prejudge, to classify, a person; so that to judge someone - for example - by and because of their political views (real or assumed) or by their religion or by their sexual orientation is an act of hubris."

As I mentioned to one correspondent:

> "My admittedly fallible view of empathy is that it is natural human faculty which most humans could possibly develope and use. A faculty that can provide a type of knowing of another living being sans words, ideas, abstractions/constructs; and which results in sympatheia - benignity - with and for that living being.
>
> I have described it a 'translocation of ourselves' where we experience a loss of that 'separation-of-otherness' which usually defines us as an individual human being, resulting in an intuition or intuitions concerning the feelings of another. Thus and for instance we can sense someone's sadness, or grief, or pain, or joy. Which, in practical terms, naturally predisposes us toward treating that person as we ourselves would wish to be treated: with compassion, understanding, honour, and dignity.
>
> In a sense, we make an 'acausal connexion' to and with another living

being, and which connexion is entirely independent of those forms, categories, and classifications we normally use to describe, and to try to 'understand', and/or which we use to judge (consciously or otherwise), another person. A process I have described as a wordless intuition concerning the physis - the being or character - of a person.

Sometimes this 'translocation of ourselves' and sympatheia with another is of a sufficiency to cause us to actually physically feel the pain of another. Which sufficiency of empathy can quite naturally make the everyday life of such an 'empath' somewhat challenging if not difficult.

As to how this faculty might be developed, I only have tentative suggestions, based on my (limited) understanding and the pathei-mathos of my rather outré life. Which suggestions concern such matters as developing an appreciation of the numinous, cultivating wu-wei, and fostering an attitude of personal humility part of which is understanding 'the cosmic perspective', of the reality of ourselves as one microcosmic fallible fragile mortal rather insignificant living being on one planet orbiting one star in one galaxy in a cosmos of billions of galaxies, and which short-lived mortal also happens to be a connexion to all life, human and otherwise, on this planet we mortals call Earth."

[10] Prejudice is defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as "preconceived opinion not based on reason or actual experience; bias".

[11] I outline my particular usage of - and sometimes particular definition of - certain terms, such as 'the good', extremism, society, innocence, and so on, in Appendix I (A Glossary of Terms) of my *Recuyle of the Philosophy of Pathei-Mathos*.

[12] A useful overview of the usage of the terms culture and civilization is given in *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* by Raymond Williams, Oxford University Press, 1976.

[13] One correspondent of mine went so far as to jest that the 'save British culture from Islamification' brigade are kindred in spirit to those who would have us remove all 'foreign' words from the English language, with in-fighting occurring and new grouplets formed because they cannot agree what constitutes a foreign word and how far, historically, they should go back in their crusade to remove such 'non-British' things and so keep 'their language pure'.

[14] As I mentioned in *The Way of Pathei-Mathos - A Philosophical Compendiary:*

εὐταξία [is] that quality of self-restraint, of a balanced, well-mannered conduct especially under adversity or duress, of which Cicero wrote:

Haec autem scientia continentur ea, quam Graeci εὐταξίαν nominant, non hanc, quam interpretamur modestiam, quo in verbo modus inest, sed illa est εὐταξία, in qua intellegitur ordinis conservatio

Those two qualities are evident in that way described by the Greeks as εὐταξίαν although what is meant by εὐταξία is not what we mean by the moderation of the moderate, but rather what we consider is restrained behaviour... *De Officiis*, Liber Primus, 142

[15] In respect of avoidance of hubris, refer to my *Recuyle Of The Philosophy Of Pathei-Mathos*.

[16] Matthew 22:21. Reddite ergo, quae sunt Caesaris, Caesari et, quae sunt Dei, Deo. Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and to God, the things that are God's.

Toward A Balanced View Of Islam and The West

The 'save our civilization from Islamification' - and 'no surrender to Shariah' - brigade often proudly speak and write about the societies of the West in glowing terms, and contrast their own 'advanced', 'civilized', societies and way of life with Islam, and which religion of the Muslims they describe as "one of the great evils of the world" [1], as 'barbaric, bloodthirsty, primitive, murderous', and which they claim 'subjugates women'.

This attitude reveals several things. That those who so pontificate are - instinctively or willfully - extremely biased against Islam, Muslims, and the Muslim way of life [2]; and/or that they have an extremely romanticized view of the societies of the West (and especially of their own society); and/or that they are hatefully speaking/writing propaganda, and inciting prejudice and hate and demonizing Islam and Muslims, in order to promote their views/cause /organization/ideology. And demonizing Islam and Muslims in much the same way as those minority of Muslims who adhere to or believe in a harsh interpretation of Islam demonize the societies of the West and some (or all) of the kuffar.

For such an attitude is unbalanced, irrational, ignorant; ignoring as it does the reality - the truth - of the societies of the West and the reality - the truth - about

the varied societies, past and present, of Muslims. [3]

A Balanced View

The balanced view is that both types of societies - the Western and the Muslim - have, and have had, problems and divisions, and governments and individuals who have sanctioned and done barbaric deeds. And people of good, honourable, intentions and people of bad, dishonourable, intentions. And people aware of the misdeeds of the past and the problems of the present - of what is morally necessary in order to offset or solve such problems - and who are trying in their own ways to make their societies better, more moral, in accord with the principles they believe in, whether those principles be described as political, religious, or social.

The anti-Muslim brigade, for instance, claim that 'Islam subjugates women' and treats them unfairly, while ignoring - or being in ignorance about - the misogyny that is rife in the West, with nearly 100,000 women per year seeking treatment in the British city of London alone for violent injuries received in their own homes, with, on average, in Britain, two women per week being killed by a male partner or former partner - that is over 100 women a year. Also, in England and Wales alone, in one year, there are around 600,000 recorded incidents of domestic violence, and every minute of every day the British Police are called by a woman who has been subject to violent domestic abuse. [4]

The anti-Muslim brigade, for instance, claim that 'Islam is barbaric, bloodthirsty, murderous', while ignoring the fact in the past hundred years Western countries have, through conflict and war, caused or contributed to far more deaths than Muslim societies: well over one hundred million human beings. Over sixty million people in the Second World War – the most brutal and bloody war in human history. Over sixteen million in the First World War. Over twenty million in the Soviet Union. Many millions killed in colonial wars; and in just two days, nearly a quarter of a million people in Japan killed by the dropping of atomic bombs. In the past three years alone, the drone strikes authorized by the Obama administration have killed between 282 and 535 civilians, of which 60 were children [5]. Such attacks have been described, by Western commentators with a legal background, as "violations of international law" [6], as "terrorizing men, women, and children" [7] and as "extra-judicial assassination - accompanied by the wanton killing of whatever civilians happen to be near the target, often including children" [8].

The anti-Muslim brigade, for instance, make claims about the 'violence and inhumanity of Jihad' while (i) ignoring the fact that no Muslim society, in the last hundred years, has invaded and occupied another land, Muslim or kuffar; and (ii) ignoring the recent colonialism of the West, and wars such as those fought in

Vietnam, and recent invasions in Iraq and Afghanistan, which have resulted in hundreds of thousands of deaths, many civilian.

Also ignored by those who pontificate about "the great evil that is Islam" are the many the social problems in Western societies which make the lives of millions of people despairing, and grim; a life which many escape from by turning to drugs or alcohol [9].

But do all the above things - and other things such the torture of Muslims in Abu Ghraib and Bagram, the rendition and torture of Muslims suspected of being terrorists, the death of 290 people on Flight 655 shot down by US missiles - make Western societies barbaric, bloodthirsty, murderous, terrorist, violent, uncaring, full of hate? Do they show that the principles underlying Western society are wrong, evil, immoral, barbaric, oppressive of women?

Or do they show that the peoples and governments of the West have done some bad things, made mistakes, but have admitted (or are beginning to admit) their errors, have learnt from them - and are still learning - and thus are not prefect and should not be idealized? Do they also show that claims of perfection, that such idealizations of the West as the anti-Muslim brigade make, are themselves wrong, mistakes worthy of reproval just as the demonization of the West by those Muslims who adhere to or believe in a harsh interpretation of Islam is wrong?

A Force For Good

My personal view now of Western societies - based on experience, a life of extremisms and subversions, and deriving from much reflexion, an acknowledgement of my own mistakes, and much pathei-mathos - is that they are a force for good, and that, for all their problems and flaws,

> "...there is, within them, a certain tolerance; a certain respect for the individual; a certain duty of care; and certainly still a freedom of life, of expression, as well as a standard of living which, for perhaps the majority, is better than elsewhere in the world and most certainly better than existed there and elsewhere in the past.
>
> In addition, there are within their structures - such as their police forces, their governments, their social and governmental institutions - people of good will, of humanity, of fairness, who strive to do what is

good, right. Indeed, far more good people in such places than bad people, so that a certain balance, the balance of goodness, is maintained even though occasionally (but not for long) that balance may seem to waver somewhat.

Furthermore, many or most of the flaws, the problems, within such societies are recognized and openly discussed, with a multitude of people of good will, of humanity, of fairness, dedicating themselves to helping those affected by such flaws, such problems. In addition, there are many others trying to improve those societies, and to trying find or implement solutions to such problems, in tolerant ways which do not cause conflict or involve the harshness, the violence, the hatred, of extremism." [10]

Furthermore, also based on experience and much reflexion, my personal view of diverse Muslim societies (Sunni and Shia, and from North Africa, to Egypt, the Sudan, the Middle East, to Asia), is that - on balance - they are also a force for good, full of people of good will, of humanity, of fairness, who strive to do what is good and avoid what is dishonourable - Amr bil Maroof wa Nahi anil Munkar.

Thus both ways of living, that of West and that of the Muslims, can profitably learn from the other, because reasoned dialogue, an acceptance, celebration, and tolerance, of diversity, is the moral, the virtuous, thing to do. From Islam we in the societies of the West might, for instance, re-learn the virtue of a personal humility, dignity, and respect for the sacred over and above the material and the profane, things which the way of Jesus of Nazareth, and the prophets before him, taught us - or saught to teach us - but which many of us somehow and for some reason seem to have forgotten (I know I forget them for decades).

Furthermore, claims of perfection about, and idealizations of, one's own society/nation/country/religion - and the demonization of others - are not only irresponsible, unwise, but also hubris, perpetuating as such hubris does the reprehensible suffering that has so blighted and which still blights this one small planet orbiting one ordinary star in one galaxy among a cosmos of billions of such star-filled galaxies.

The solution to such suffering, such mistakes, is simple, for it begins with each one of us, internally. With a rejection of extremism, and a discovery and an appreciation of (or a rediscovery of) the numinous and of our shared humanity; an appreciation that predisposes us feel and know our limitations and faults, as fallible mortals, and which feeling and knowing forms the essence of Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Sikhism, Hinduism, Taoism, and of the humanism that has motivated and inspired so many in the West for two

centuries or more.

Notes

[1] Richard Dawkins, speaking in Stornoway, as reported in The Scotsman newspaper, dated November 2, 2012.

[2] In *Concerning Islamophobia*, I wrote:

> "The 'indiscriminate negative attitudes or emotions' that Islamophobics have for Islam and Muslims is the result, in my fallible view and in my experience, of a lack of knowledge - an ignorance - about both Islam and the Muslim way of life, and of the propensity we humans seem to have to express opinions about, or pass judgement on something we have little or no personal experience of, and/ or on someone or some many we do not personally know. This personal ignorance concerning something, or someone or some many, we express an opinion or views about is also something we seldom admit to others, and often do not admit even to ourselves."

One propaganda ploy used by the 'save our civilization from Islamification' brigade - redolent of their ignorance, of their lack of knowledge about Islam and their lack of practical in-depth experience of the Muslim way of life - is to quote English interpretations of a particular hadith and English interpretations of ayat from the Quran, thus ignoring (i) that a particular hadith or ayat (and Ahadith and Ayah in general) should be studied in Arabic and must be considered in the context of the whole Quran and the Sunnah and Ijmah combined; and (ii) the truth that to know, fully understand, and appreciate, the religion of Islam - the Muslim way of life - one must have extensive practical experience of how those texts, the Quran, the Sunnah, and Ijmah, are manifested by and in the daily and the social lives of those who use them as guides to living and as guides to the sacred, the divine. And a practical experience that is diverse: not of only one locale, but of many. In the case of Islam, this means understanding Adab, and appreciating, from experience, the diversity within Islam - for example, the Sufism of North Africa; the way of life of the fellaheen of Egypt, Turkey, Morocco; the way of life of Punjabi Muslims in places like Leicester, and of Muslims in Somali and Dar-es-Salaam. And it is such diverse practical experience that will enable a person to appreciate just what Shariah is, what it means, and what it does not mean nor imply. Anything other than this is, in my view, ignorance of Islam.

[3] Among the ignoble propaganda ploys used by the 'save our civilization from

Islamification' brigade is to report some crime or ignoble deed if and only if the religion (or the presumed religion) of the perpetrator is Muslim, or if the perceived ethnicity of the perpetrator is Asian/Arab/African, to thus 'prove/show' how horrid, bad, brutal, barbaric, those 'muzzies'/Arabs/Asians/foreigners are. These propagandists thus ignore similar deeds done by Europeans/Whites /Christians.

Another ignoble propaganda ploy they use is to report some crime or ignoble deed done by, or words spoken by, some Muslim or Muslims who adhere to or believe in a harsh interpretation of Islam and then claim that that deed or those words 'prove how horrid, bad, brutal, barbaric, terroristic, Islam is'. These propagandists thus ignore similar extremist deeds done, or similar harsh words spoken, by Europeans/Whites/Christians, past and present.

[4] Sources: (a) *Punching Judy*, BBC TV Documentary; (b) Crime in England and Wales (Home Office annual publication); (c) Women's Aid Federation of England.

[5] Bureau of Investigative Journalism. *Covert Strikes in Pakistan, Yemen, and Somalia*, 2012

[6] *Living Under Drone*s, Report by New York University School of Law and Stanford University Law School, 2012

[7] Glenn Greenwald. The Guardian, September 25, 2012

[8] Glenn Greenwald. The Guardian, November 15, 2012.

[9] For instance, cocaine use in England and Wales is the highest in Europe, indulged in by over four million people – and Scotland's rate of cocaine use is among the highest in the whole world. [Source: European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction]

For instance, America has the highest number of people in prison, per capita, in the whole world – over 1.7 million people, with well over half of all prisoners in America there for drug related offences [Source: (a) Drug Policy Information Clearinghouse (White House Office of National Drug Control Policy); (b) Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (The Department of Health and Human Services).]. In addition nearly 22 million Americans aged 12 or older are illicit drug users [Source: (a) Foundation for Social Improvement; (b) Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, The Department of Health and Human Services].

In respect of alcohol, an estimated 15 to 20 million Americans are addicted to alcohol or regularly abuse alcohol for personal or social reasons. Furthermore,

in America, alcohol use is involved in: (a) one-half of all murders, accidental deaths, and suicides; (b) one-third of all drowning, boating and aviation deaths; (c) one-half of all crimes; and (d) almost half of all fatal automobile accidents. [Source: (a) National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism; (b) Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, The Department of Health and Human Services]

[10] David Myatt, *Notes on The Politics and Ideology of Hate*, April 2012

Concerning Islamophobia
Some Personal Comments from Experience and Pathei-Mathos

Introduction

Islamophobia has been defined as "indiscriminate negative attitudes or emotions directed at Islam or Muslims" [1] and thus, "as with parallel concepts like homophobia or xenophobia, Islamophobia connotes a broader set of negative attitudes or emotions directed at individuals or groups because of their perceived membership in a category."

An essential feature of Islamophobia is therefore an acceptance of there being a division between 'us' and 'them', with both 'us' and 'them' represented by abstract concepts/categories such as national culture, national or religious identity, and/or perceived (or assumed) ethnic identity. In addition - as invariably occurs and has throughout history occurred - this division into 'them' and 'us' includes or comes to include a conscious or an unconscious belief in 'us' being better than, or more 'civilized' than, 'them'.

Hence, those afflicted by Islamophobia are prejudiced against - or develop a prejudice against - Muslims and against the religion of Islam, and which prejudice often leads them to treat Muslims in a bigoted way. And prejudiced because Islamophobics feel - and need to believe - that Islam and/or Muslims are somehow 'inferior' or 'uncivilized' or 'barbaric'.

Over the past decade Islamophobia has markedly increased, and has become an integral part of most 'extreme right-wing', racist, and self-styled nationalist, political organizations in Europe, with many such groups making their self-proclaimed 'crusade' against Islam, Sharia, and Muslim 'immigrants', their main focus. A self-proclaimed 'crusade' evident, for example, in the actions and the diatribal writings of the person who, in July of 2011, left a bomb near a government building in Oslo, Norway, that killed eight people, and who then

proceeded to – on the nearby island of Utøya – shoot dead sixty-nine others, the majority of whom were young innocent [2] people.

A Lack of Knowledge, A Surfeit of Ignorance

The "indiscriminate negative attitudes or emotions" that Islamophobics have for Islam and Muslims is the result, in my fallible view and in my experience, of a lack of knowledge - an ignorance - about both Islam and the Muslim way of life, and of the propensity we humans seem to have to express opinions about, or pass judgement on something we have little or no personal experience of, and/or on someone or some many we do not personally know. This personal ignorance concerning something, or someone or some many, we express an opinion or views about is also something we seldom admit to others, and often do not admit even to ourselves.

In general, Islamophobics have an emotive, indiscriminate, and therefore unreasonable, reaction to - a dislike of, or a fear of, or an aversion to, or a hatred of, and/or an instinctive prejudice against - what they do not know and have no personal experience of; what they are ignorant of. An emotive, unreasonable, response and reaction - an attitude, an ignorance - which certain political groups take advantage of and encourage, and/or which emotive attitude and ignorance is or has been the genesis for the formation of some groups with a particular anti-Muslim agenda.

For instance, how many of the leaders, organizers, members and supporters, of groups with an anti-Muslim and anti-Islamic agenda and policies - and who glibly talk, write, and demonstrate, about Shariah - have read the Quran in Arabic? How many have studied the Sunnah - at the very least the collections of Bukhari and Muslim? How many have studied Al-Adab Al-Mufrad? How many have studied Islamic jurisprudence and discussed Shariah with a Qadi or three? How many conversations about Islam have they had with learned Imaams? Have they lived in a land where the majority of people are Muslim and so have practical experience of the Muslim way of life? Have they, from personal experience, compared the way of life of Muslims in that land to the lives of Muslims in other lands? How many times have they been guests of Muslim families and so shared meals and personal conversations and thus empathised with Muslims? How many Muslim women have they interviewed or asked about Hijab - about why they wear it and how it makes them feel? How many have read the maxims of Islamic jurisprudence contained in Al-Majallah al-Ahkam al-Adaliyyah?

If they have not done all these things then they are uneducated and ill-informed about Shariah, about Islam, about Muslims, and about the Muslim way of life. That is, the views and the opinions about Islam, about Shariah, about Muslims,

about the Muslim way of life, expressed by such groups - and expressed by those who are active members or active supporters of such groups - are both prejudiced and extremist. And extremist because unbalanced, intemperate, impersonal, and harsh [3].

For my experience - my forty years as a practical extremist, my decade long experience and study of Islam and the Muslim way of life, and the pathei-mathos that resulted from these decades and from my experience of Islam, and thence led to me rejecting extremism - inclines me to conclude several things about extremists, extremism, Islam, and religions in general.

First, that the essence of all extremism, whether manifesting in a political, a religious, a social, or a personal way, is an ill-informed and prejudiced certitude; a hubriatic certitude-of-knowing. That is, an arrogant belief that one is - or the cause/faith/ideology/group/party/movement/leader is - 'right', combined with an unwillingness or an inability to admit one 'does not know' or may be wrong, combined with an adherence to or a belief in a particular 'abstraction of belonging' and which abstraction of belonging provides an intense sense of pride and identity sufficient to engender and provoke not only a dislike and often a hatred of 'those not like us' but also bigotry and violence.

Second, that the antithesis of extremism is that humility and appreciation of the numinous that, in my view [4] forms - or formed - the basis of all conventional religions (from Judaism to Christianity to Islam to Hinduism to Sikhism) and all Ways of Life [5] (such as Taoism and Buddhism) with it being necessary, in order that a person properly understands and appreciates such religions and Ways, for that person to have a personal experience and a personal knowing over a period of time of the daily lives of many of those who believe in, who profess, or who practice that religion or Way.

Third, that I have developed a great respect for not only the Muslim way of life, but also for the ways of life engendered by Judaism, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism, Taoism, and Buddhism.

This respect of diversity and difference, this humility and appreciation of the numinous - and the need for personal experience, a personal knowing, and knowledge, in order to truthfully know about some thing, about some one or some people - are manifestly absent in extremists. For extremism thrives on, and has its genesis in, ignorance and arrogance. An ignorance and an arrogance exemplified whenever an extremist fanatically acts in the name of their needed Islamophobia.

For example, what did the person who - in his self-professed 'crusade against the

Islamisation of Western Europe ' - murdered seventy-seven people in Norway in July 2011 know - personally and from study and travels - about Islam, Muslims, and the Muslim way of life? What did this person really know and understand about the Western culture he professed needed defending from Islam, Muslims, and the 'multiculturalists' he hated?

Rumpledhatevik - as I prefer to call him [6] - knew very little, and understood even less, as his 'manifesto' and his life prior to his murders clearly reveal. His sources in respect of Islam - in his turgid 'manifesto' - include magazine and newspaper articles (many by fellow Islamophobes), a novel by Leon Uris, and websites such as the Islamophobic 'jihad-watch' from which he cuts-and-pastes their inaccurate and propagandistic article 'Islam 101' [7]. Other cut-and pastes about Islam include schoolboy howlers, as when an author claims that Ibn Taymiyya is considered a "lighthouse for today's Khomeini's". [That author really should have read *Minhaj as-Sunnah an-Nabawiyyah* first.] That Rumpledhatevik considered such prejudiced, ignorant, material about Islam merited inclusion is evidential of his own ignorance about such matters.

His sources and his words in respect of the Western Christian culture he professed to be defending are equally revealing, indicating a person who (i) has no personal knowledge and experience of, and/or no empathy with - and certainly no understanding of the importance of - a Christian humility and compassion, chivalry and manners, humanism, freedom of religion, and of equal and impartial justice under the law; and who (ii) is lacking a scholarly knowledge of - and thence a balanced, reasoned, cultured understanding of - Homer, Sappho, Sophocles, Aeschylus, Cicero, Livy, Hillel the Elder, Abelard, Thomas Aquinas, Dante Alighieri, and many many others. Perhaps Rumpledhatevik had also never heard of, or never studied the lives of, people such as George Fox, Mother Teresa, and Martin Luther King,

For he, and the extremists, the Islamophobes, he exemplifies, are ignorant about those whom and that which they hate; ignorant about what they profess to care about and believe they are defending; and arrogantly talk, write, about, and fight - and are prepared to kill others - for what they do not understand and have little or no personal experience of.

Notes

[1] Professor Erik Bleich: *What Is Islamophobia?* American Behavioral Scientist, vol. 55 no. 12, December 2011. pp. 1581-1600

[2] As I wrote in *The Way of Pathei-Mathos - A Philosophical Compendiary*, I regard innocence as,

> ...an attribute of those who, being personally unknown to us, are therefore unjudged by us and who thus are given the benefit of the doubt. For this presumption of innocence of others – until direct personal experience, and individual and empathic knowing of them, prove otherwise – is the fair, the reasoned, the numinous, the human, thing to do.
>
> Empathy and *πάθει μάθος* incline us toward treating other human beings as we ourselves would wish to be treated; that is they incline us toward fairness, toward self-restraint, toward being well-mannered, and toward an appreciation and understanding of innocence.

[3] My definition of an extremist is,

> "a person who tends toward harshness, or who is harsh, or who supports/incites harshness, in pursuit of some objective, usually of a political or a religious nature. Here, *harsh* is: rough, severe, a tendency to be unfeeling, unempathic. Hence *extremism* is considered to be: (a) the result of such harshness, and (b) the principles, the causes, the characteristics, that promote, incite, or describe the harsh action of extremists."

It should be noted that in this essay I am critical of (i) political groups or organizations or parties of a particular prejudiced ilk; and (ii) the attitude, actions, and beliefs, of those who have an emotive (and intemperate, indiscriminate) reaction to Muslims, to the Muslim way of life, and to the religion of Islam, and who therefore are prejudiced against - or who develope a prejudice against - Muslims, the Muslim way of life, and the religion of Islam. To be so personally prejudiced, to so have such an indiscriminate negative attitude toward Muslims and their way of life, is a harsh, an unempathic, an intemperate, thing to do; and someone who in some manner translates - or is motivated to translate - this negative attitude and prejudice into practical deeds, or who incites others to do so, or who actively promotes such harsh attitudes and prejudice, is an extremist, just as a group or organization or political party which supports or incites or which is founded on such harsh attitudes and prejudice, is an extremist group/organization/party. And extremist even if some of its members or supporters are not, themselves, extremists: are not prejudiced, and/or not ignorant about those who or that which such an extremist entity opposes.

[4] qv. *Pathei-Mathos, A Way To Humility*. As I wrote in that work:

It seems to me there is, to paraphrase an expression of George Fox used by The Religious Society of Friends, 'that of the numinous' in every person, and that answering to 'that of the numinous' can take and has taken various manifestations over millennia with all such manifestations deserving of respect since there is an underlying unity, a similar spiritual essence - a similar discovery and knowing and appreciation of the numinous, a similar understanding of the error of hubris - beyond those different outer manifestations and the different terms and expressions and allegories used to elucidate 'that of the numinous'.

In respect of humility, I use the term here and elsewhere,

"...in a spiritual context, to refer to that gentleness, that modest demeanour, that understanding, which derives from an appreciation of the numinous and also from one's own admitted uncertainty of knowing and one's acknowledgement of past mistakes. An uncertainty of knowing, an acknowledgement of mistakes, that often derive from *πάθει μάθος*.

Humility is thus the natural human balance that offsets the unbalance of hubris (ὕβρις) - the balance that offsets the unbalance of pride and arrogance, and the balance that offsets the unbalance of that certainty of knowing which is one basis for extremism, for extremist beliefs, for fanaticism and intolerance. That is, humility is a manifestation of the natural balance of Life; a restoration of *ἁρμονίη*, of *δίκη*, of *σωφρονεῖν* - of those qualities and virtues - that hubris and extremism, that *ἔρις* and *πόλεμος*, undermine, distance us from, and replace." *Pathei-Mathos, A Way To Humility*

[5] qv. *Pathei-Mathos, A Way To Humility* where I make a (rather pedantic) distinction between a Way and a religion.

[6] qv. *Concerning the 2011 Massacre in Norway - A Personal Analysis of an Extremist*

[7] Sometimes the prejudice that the author of this '101' item has for Islam - and his obvious lack of knowledge and lack of personal experience regarding Islam and the Muslims - can be faintly amusing, as when he invokes an imaginary apostate after claiming that "while Muslims who present their religion as peaceful abound throughout dar al-harb, they are nearly non-existent in dar al-Islam" and that "a litmus test for Westerners who believe that Islam is a

religion of peace and tolerance [is] try making that point on a street corner in Ramallah, or Riyadh, or Islamabad, or anywhere in the Muslim world. He assured me you wouldn't live five minutes." Well, I have asked such questions in such and similar places, and had some very interesting and informative and above all rational and courteous discussions (some of which continued over a shared meal), and which discussions in such diverse places - from Egypt, the Sudan, North Africa, to the Middle East to Asia - revealed that, yes, Islam is considered by Muslims in Muslim lands to be a way of tolerance and of both outer and inner peace. Perhaps if the author - instead of conjuring up an imaginary friend - had made the effort to learn by travelling to such places and talking to ordinary Muslims, to Ulaamah, to members of the Muslim Brotherhood, and to Sufi teachers, a little of his ignorance and prejudice and arrogance may have been dispelled.